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### Book Review

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## BOOK REVIEW

### **The Myth of Depression as Disease: Limitations and alternatives to drug treatment**

Allan M. Leventhal & Christopher R. Martell

Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006

178 pp., £22.95/\$43.95 hbk

ISBN 0-275-98976-3

I really wanted to be impressed by this book because I warmed to its theme: that anti-depressants are over-prescribed and that behavioural therapies are the way forward. But I am left wondering who its audience might be. One avowed aim of the book is “to empower depressed people” but if you are depressed you can barely get through the Gruffalo never mind over 150 dense pages relating the history of psychotherapy and learning theory. Maybe the authors identify their own problem, when they describe it not as a textbook or a self-help book, but having elements of both. As a result it falls into limbo land and fails to exploit techniques – e.g., case histories, bulleted lists – that would have made it much more readable.

This is a shame, because buried in it there are many valid points. The authors (both clinicians based in the USA) mainly target the pharmaceutical industry, which as they point out often favours profit over people, but psychiatry also comes in for criticism. They argue that medication has unjustifiably become the first port of call for tackling depression when there is evidence that 80% of anti-depressant effect is placebo, and that psychological therapy is at least as effective, safer and, when treatment ceases, has a lower rate of relapse. Their functional model of depression revolves around learned sequences of behaviour – most importantly, avoidance behaviour. Among the behavioural therapies they advocate is “acceptance and commitment therapy” which encourages people with depression not to struggle against negative emotion but to accept life as it is and commit themselves to actions which will help bring about the existence they want.

By targeting both lay people and professionals, this book lacks focus. But, if it encourages practitioners to think twice before reaching for the prescription pad, then that is a job well done.

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